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A health worker collecting the swab samples of a woman in Mumbai | PTI

MAHARASHTRA: 14,317 NEW CASES
The state recorded 14,317 new cases on Thursday, the highest one-day spike this year. The active case tally stood at 1,06,070, thrice the number in Kerala, which came second with 33,785. As many as 57 deaths were reported, three more than Wednesday

MADHYA PRADESH
Four deaths and 530 new cases were reported on Thursday. The active case tally stood at 4,094. No fresh case was reported in nine of the total 52 districts in the state during the day

GUJARAT
The State added 710 cases to its active tally, taking the number to 4,788 while 451 recovered. No death was reported in 24 hours. Its recovery rate was down to 97.03% from 97.36% last week

TAMIL NADU
- The State reported 685 fresh cases and five deaths on Thursday, taking the case tally to 8,57,602 and the death toll to 12,535
- Preventive measures have been strengthened, with flying squads mounting vigil. The Nilgiris has warned of six-month jail to those not wearing masks; 12,06,164 people have been vaccinated so far

2,56,85,011
PEOPLE VACCINATED ACROSS INDIA AS ON THURSDAY

Harsh lockdown measures back as Covid climbs

States like Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Gujarat and MP could be at tipping point

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mumbai/New Delhi/Chennai

WITH the fresh Covid case count continuing to climb in Maharashtra, a worried Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday announced total lockdown in some districts of North Maharashtra and Vidarbha, including Nagpur. Stricter measures will be taken if the situation does not improve, he said.

Senior officials at the Centre shared his concern, as Maharashtra is witnessing the most intense second wave of infections.

Also, states like Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh could be at the tipping point, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan warned.

"We are very worried about Maharashtra," said V K Paul, member, health, Niti Aayog, who also heads the national Covid-19 task force.

"This is a serious matter. It has two lessons — don't take the virus for granted; and if we have to remain Covid free, then, we need to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour, containment strategy and vaccination," Paul said.

Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) director general Balram Bhargava, while ruling out the role of mutant virus in the surge in the cases, put the blame on slackness on the part of the administration and the people.

CONTINUED ON: P16

K'taka records small peaks in Covid graph since February-end

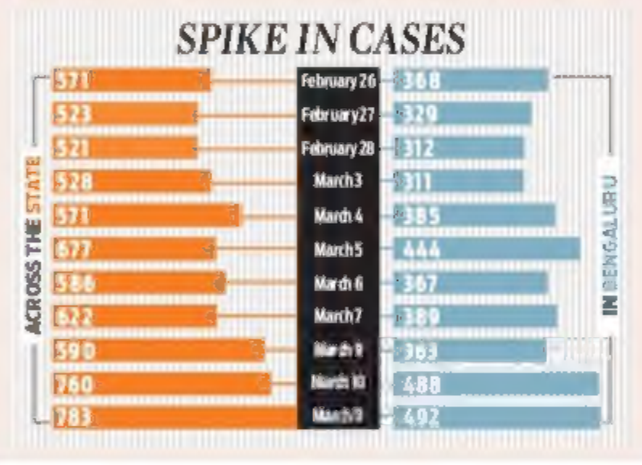
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

AFTER weeks of plateau, the state has been witnessing spurts of increased Covid-19 cases on some days towards the end of February and the beginning of March. While for the most part of February, the new cases were in the range of 300-400 a day in Karnataka, the numbers shot up to anywhere between 500 and 700 on some days. In Bengaluru too, the number of patients testing positive daily hovered around 100 to 200, but increased to between 300 and 400 on some days.

On Thursday, Health and Medical Education Dr K Sudhakar tweeted, "In one day, more than 13,000 cases were recorded in Maharashtra. This is worrying to me. We need to be cautious, wear masks and follow social distance while celebrating festivals, in functions, gatherings. We must avoid crowding." On Wednesday, the minister had also said that the government will ban late-night parties as more people gather at that time.

In a series of tweets, Sudhakar urged those above 60 and those above 45 with comorbidities to get inoculated. He also tagged Minister of Primary and Secondary Education S Suresh Kumar, asking him to take action against private schools, by cancelling their licences, as some of them are reopening classes for Grades 1 to 6 without government approval.

The state reported its first case of a patient with the South African variant of the SARS-CoV2 virus from Shivamogga on Wednesday. In the light of the virus variants, the rise in cases in Maharashtra and Kerala, an expert said that people need to be cautious, but not worried. "When we look at the data on the number of cases and test positivity rate, it does not show a sign of a second wave yet. There is a rise in cases due to increased testing," said Dr Pradeep Banandur, Professor of Epidemiology at NIMHANS and member of state Technical Advisory Committee for Covid-19. P3



EXPRESS READ

Sabarimala incidents pained me: Minister

T'puram: In poll-bound Kerala, Devaswom Minister Kadakampally Surendran on Thursday virtually expressed regret for the incidents that rocked the Sabarimala temple in 2018 on women's entry. P5

Apple starts assembly of IPhone 12 in India

New Delhi: Apple Inc is commencing assembly of its IPhone 12 model in the country, a move that is expected to help the US tech giant consolidate its position in the burgeoning smartphone market in India.

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE

SEVERE SUMMER BEATS DOWN

Their nests and hatchlings left exposed to the elements and menacing birds of prey, a family of crows hovers protectively around a tree, left bare and dry due to the arid weather. The mercury has been on the upswing, signalling a harsh summer for Bengaluru | VINOD KUMAR T

Time for single NEET again, won't be online

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test would be conducted only once this year and it would be a pen-and-paper affair. An earlier proposal to hold an online test twice for admissions to medical and dental colleges will not be implemented this year. The decision follows a meeting between officials of the Union health ministry and the National Testing Agency, the nodal body tasked with conducting NEET, on Wednesday last.

Stating that the decision not to tinker with the test pattern was taken to ease the pressure off students reeling under the pandemic, an official said: "An online test may also prove disadvantageous for the students from rural areas." The NTA will release the examination schedule and brochure in two-three days after a final date is decided. The test is likely to be held either in late June or July.

Earlier, officials had proposed to conduct NEET twice for the first time to ease the pressure off students to perform their best in one attempt.

Mamata now says crowd caused accident

PRONAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

A day after alleging attack by political opponents in Nandigram, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said her leg injury was caused by an accident.

In a video message from SSKM Hospital, where she is under treatment, Mamata said she was waving to supporters from the footboard of her car and got sandwiched between the door and the front seat due to pressure from the crowd.

Urging TMC workers to stay calm and not do anything that will inconvenience the public, Mamata said she will use a wheelchair and resume her activities in two-three days.

Mamata's medical examination at the hospital revealed cracks on her feet and ankle and injuries on her elbow and shoulder. She complained of chest pain and headache but ECG and MRI reports found no injury. She also underwent CT scan on Thursday. The doctors treating the CM advised her rest for 10 days.

"It is a fact that I was badly hurt. I received injuries on my leg, elbow and shoulder. There were bone and ligament injuries. I suffered chest pain. I was greeting people from the car and the crowd moved forward. The entire pressure was on me and I got sandwiched. I was given medicine that was with me and taken to Kolkata," she said in her video message.

Preliminary investigation by the police, too, revealed the incident was an accident. Senior police officials visited the spot and recorded statements of eyewitnesses. TMC sources said the CM's initial reaction alleging conspiracy and attack might have been made in a fit of rage. "She might have later realised the conspiracy allegation could hurt her own supporters who wanted to have a glimpse of the CM," said a TMC leader.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission reacted sharply to the TMC's memorandum asking the poll body to take responsibility for the "attack".

"It is incorrect to suggest the Commission has taken over the law and order machinery in the state in the name of conducting elections and appropriated the whole governance structure," the EC said. P9

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's left leg in a plaster of Paris cast at the SSKM hospital in Kolkata on Wednesday | PTI

Violence dents democracy, says Deve Gowda

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru/Haradanahalli (Hassan dist)

Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda on Thursday expressed concern over the alleged assault on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Referring to Mamata as his sister, the JDS supremo wished her speedy recovery, while appealing for restraint on all sides. "I am very much concerned about the health condition of my sister and colleague Mamata Banerjee. I wish her a quick recovery. We all fight elections. We win some lose some, but violence corrodes the spirit of democracy. Hope all sides will observe restraint," he tweeted, tagging TMC's official Twitter handle.

Gowda's concern for Mamata comes at a time when BJP and Congress leaders have alleged that her claims of attack and injuries were untrue. P6

Release cash seized from business partner of DKS' wife, HC tells CBI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court has directed the CBI to release the amount seized from the premises of a firm, and also from Sachin Narayan, a business partner of Congress leader D K Shivakumar' wife. Sachin is an accused in a case registered by the CBI with regard to disproportionate assets.

Allowing two separate petitions, Justice John Michael Cunha directed the CBI to release the cash to the petitioners, subject to executing an indemnity bond for an equal sum to the satisfaction of the trial court.

The first petition was filed by Wellworth Software Pvt Ltd seeking direction to the Anti-Corruption Bureau of the CBI to release an amount of ₹47.98 lakh seized on October 5, 2020, in connection with a case pending before a special court to try criminal cases against elected representatives in the city. Similarly, Sachin Narayan had also filed a petition seeking directions to CBI to release ₹ 5.48 lakh seized from his residence.

Noting that there is nothing on record to show that the amount seized from the company is either proceeds of the crime alleged against Shivakumar or the business dealing of his wife, Justice Cunha said the petitioners are entitled for the interim custody of the seized cash. Even otherwise, the interim release of the seized property does not preclude the CBI from investigating into the source of the said funds of the public servant. The petitioners are not accused of abetting the offence by the public servant. In these circumstances, there is no justification to retain the cash belonging to the petitioners, he said, while setting aside the order passed by the Special Court on November 20, 2020. P5

COLONIAL HERITAGE

Portuguese-era structure, tucked away in Western Ghats, discovered

NAUSHAD BIJAPUR @ Belagavi

A Portuguese-era heritage structure, built 135 years ago and hidden from sight in the dense Western Ghats on the Karnataka-Goa border since many decades, has been discovered by officials of the Hubli division of South Western Railway. The two-storey heritage structure is situated in the Braganza Ghat section near Castlerock, just about half-km away from Dudhsagar, one of the beautiful waterfalls in the country on the Karnataka-Maharashtra border.

Excited with the discovery of the original Portuguese architectural building, the South Western Railways (SWR) has launched an operation not only to preserve it, but also involve heritage lovers to rediscover the unique past of Goa.

The two-storeyed structure was constructed by the West of India Portuguese Guaranteed Railway (WIPGR) company in 1885. It was a part of the historical WIPGR project taken up during the construction of Mormugao harbour in Goa. The 83-km rail route connected the then Portuguese Goa with British India via the Western Ghats and the construction involved two different companies in two colonial jurisdictions, according to P K Mishra, SWR Additional General Manager, who has initiated the restoration of the structure.

Speaking to *TNIE*, Mishra said, several historical structures of the Portuguese era along the rail line were demolished during the gauge conversion. The recently discovered structure stands testimony to the history and interesting architectural features of the Portuguese period, he added.

Mishra underlined the need to restore the structure in an attempt to revive the past glory of the region along the Karnataka-Goa border. On the restoration plans which his department has, Mishra said, the building will have a heritage gallery on the first and second floors with the ground floor developed as a rest house. "Plans are also afoot to create a heritage walk around Dudhsagar to provide a beautiful view to tourists on this lush green stretch," he said. The 1,200 sq ft two-storeyed structure served as a railway station when the metre-gauge rail line first opened for operation here. According to sources, the ground floor was the station master's room and two other rooms on the same floor were used as washroom and storeroom. On the first floor, there is a large drawing room, bedroom and a kitchen. The building provides a panoramic view from the second floor.

Mishra added that a treaty was signed in December 1878 at Lisbon between Portugal and Great Britain to lay a rail line on the west coast of India. A committee, under the Duke of Sutherland, visited India to explore the possibilities of having a railway from Mormugao to Castle Rock. The survey, which began in February 1880, was completed in July that year. Later, a contract was inked between the Portuguese and British authorities for the project. The West of India Portuguese Railway Company was then formed.

Plans are also afoot to create a heritage walk around Dudhsagar to provide a beautiful view to tourists on this lush green stretch

PK Mishra,
SWR Additional General Manager

The two-storeyed structure, located on the Karnataka-Goa border, was built by the West of India Portuguese Guaranteed Railway company in 1885 | EXPRESS